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COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER MICHAEL A. BROWN
Chairman, Committee on Housing and Workforce Development

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

Dear Commissioner Hood,

I applaud the initiative to rewrite the zoning code. After 50 years, it is a monumental task with far reaching consequences. Fortunately our Planning staff are superb professionals; they are doing a challenging job for all of us.

I would like to express my concerns about the groundswell of anxiety the work has provoked. From your long experience, you know every zoning interpretation results in delight or dismay. Looking at the schedule for approval, I fear trouble lies ahead: we are moving too fast to assure we will reach a responsible result; and we are not laying the groundwork to ensure residents will understand or accept the result.

I am concerned that at this late stage of the process, that once the code is adopted our zoning professionals will be hampered by unresolved issues, multiple interpretations and warring parties, arguing over issues we could have addressed in a more inclusive, collaborative process.

People tell me they do not understand why changes are proposed. The purpose, rationale, planning assumptions and intended outcomes have not been made clear. Interaction between discrete regulations seems to have been overlooked: can we be sure the cumulative effects add up to what we want in each neighborhood? A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't seem right for our city, with its rich history of unique neighborhoods, but that seems to be direction we are heading. Will the code reflect the Comprehensive Plan, or will it take us off on an uncharted course?

Residents tell me they "have no clue" what is happening. Rewrite working sessions, though public, are for technical specialists and a few volunteers. We cannot consider this "outreach" to the public. Educating the public on the nature and range of issues at play is challenging; many aspects are complicated and obscure. But that should not deter us from making the case. This code has to "make sense" to the public before final adoption, not after. The code should not be used as a blunt instrument to drive unsupported social change. And we should not take for granted the hard-earned tranquility of our residents.

If I may, one final point. We have many areas crying out for development, housing and amenities. We have many neighborhoods where families live quietly and peacefully. I see no reason to disrupt these neighborhoods in our zeal to bring in more mobile

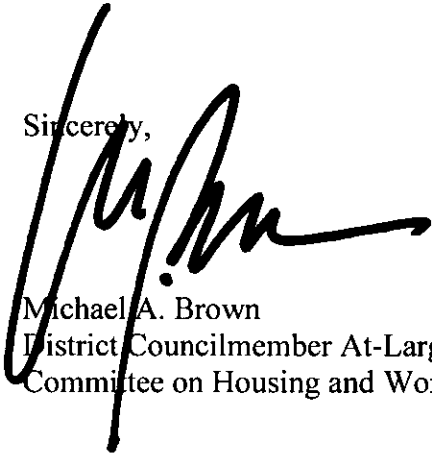
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW ~ Washington, DC 20004 ~ Suite 406
(202) 724.8105 -office; (202) 724.8071-fax; www.dccouncil.us

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 156-06
EXHIBIT NO. 156
EXHIBIT NO. 156

residents. For example, you might reexamine the “accessory housing units” (AHU). They are not consistent with single family neighborhoods; an effort to put them in seems counterproductive. We have work to do to make the city more desirable for families; I suggest we focus on that, not push resident families out. “Transit zones,” too, are a fraught topic: I suggest caution moving in that direction.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to raise my concerns with you; I am available, as always, to discuss further with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael A. Brown', written over the printed name and title.

Michael A. Brown
District Councilmember At-Large
Committee on Housing and Workforce Development